

# São Francisco River Transposition Project\*

*BISHOP LUIZ FLÁVIO CAPPIO*

**F**IRST OF ALL, I would like to thank the opportunity given to me to speak to my fellow bishops and thus be able to clarify our positioning in relation to the Project of Transposition of the Waters of the São Francisco River and to settle some doubts that still persist.

To be brief, concise and didactic, I will explain the issue in four points:

1. We only took on the defiant and evangelical stance of “fast and prayer” after all the attempts to establish a true, ethical and transparent dialogue with the federal government had run out. As I said: “when reason is extinct, the path is madness”. Jesus Himself taught us that when the enemy is too strong and powerful, only fast and prayer are able to face him. From the bottom of my heart, I beg for my fellows’ forgiveness for the embarrassment and suffering that I caused to you and to God’s good people.
2. As we have always been claiming, our opposing positioning is not to the project as such, but to the waters’ addressing. If the purpose of the project was primarily human and animal thirst quenching, we would favor the project. Water is a crucial good for life and that must be its primary use. The project inverts that priority by favoring its economic use. The multiuse of water, to be ethical, can only be verified once its essential function, which is human and animal supply, is served. In the public hearing held in the Federal Senate on the latest February 14<sup>th</sup>, both Mr. Minister of National Integration Geddel Vieira Lima and Mr. Federal Representative Ciro Gomes publicly acknowledged for the first time the economic use of transposition water as the priority of the project, unlike what the official propaganda always stated, that water would be used to quench the thirst of the poor people or that the thirsty people support the project. Finally, the government acknowledged the project’s truth.
3. There’s an abundance of water in the entire Brazilian northeast, but it’s concentrated, accumulated in specific places such as in the São Francisco River and its tributaries and in the set of dams in the north part of the northeast and in specific periods of floods.

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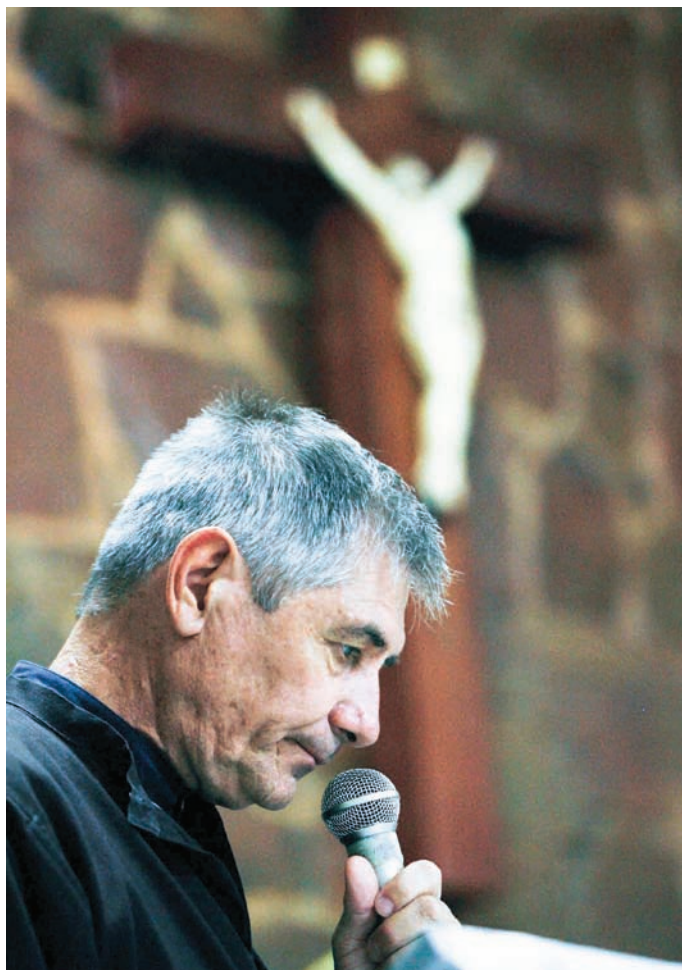


Photo: Associated Press/ Eraldo Peres. November 27, 2007.

What we urgently need is the following:

- a) To revitalize the São Francisco River and its tributaries and the set of dams, by means of the reforestation of their sources, restoring of the forests along the river margins and basic sanitation undertakings to prevent the sanitary and chemical wastes from being thrown *in natura* into the rivers and dams;
- b) A distribution network of this concentrated water in such a way as to reach the diffused populations before it evaporates. Such network was programmed in the Alternative Projects about which we'll talk later. It's those diffused populations, those who live spread all over the corners of the Northeastern semi-arid, that lack water the most and must be the true receivers of the available resources to serve the water demands.

We, bishops of the São Francisco, live near the river's chute. If we walk five hundred or one thousand meters towards the caatinga, we will find the communities who lack water. The same thing happens with the diffused population of the receiving States in relation to the dams.



Photo: Folha Imagem/ Antônio Gaudério. June 5, 2007.

*Army soldiers make the first measurements for the building of the Tucutu Dam, in Cabrobó (PE). Men and machines drill the bed of the North canal in order to place explosives and to increase its deepness.*

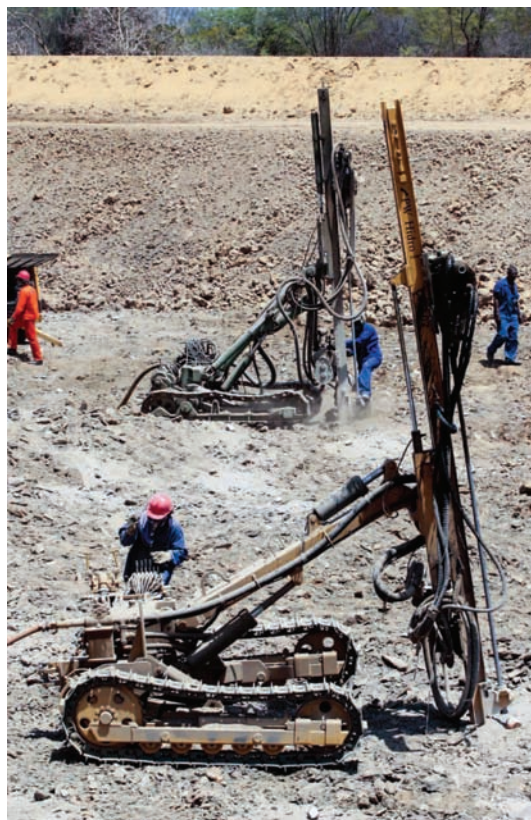


Photo: Folha Imagem/ Ivan Cruz. January 7, 2008.

The project doesn't propose the distribution and the democratization of the water, but as its advocates call it, "water security of the dams".

According to the project, the goal of the São Francisco waters is to ensure the water security of the dams and basins of the receiving States in such a way as not to jeopardize the economic use of the waters and the agro-industrial ventures.

We repeat: If the transposition waters were for human and animal supply, we would be the first to support the project.

4. I would ask: Why does the government insist so much in the Transposition Project when the government itself presents feasible alternatives for water supply of the diffused populations?

The National Water Agency (ANA) released its “Atlas of the Northeast Region”, presenting water supply to the urban populations of the Northeast and of the North of the State of Minas Gerais.

The Semi-Arid Articulation (ASA) foresees water supply alternatives in rural areas.

While the Transposition Project proposes the supply of only twelve million people (mostly inhabitants of the great Northeastern capitals which already have water supply), for half the price, the Alternative Project of water supply, once implemented, will serve 44 million human beings.

While the Transposition Project serves only 397 municipalities, for half that price, the Alternative Projects will serve 1,346 municipalities.

While the Transposition Project serves only four Brazilian States (Pernambuco, Paraíba, Rio Grande do Norte and Ceará), the Alternative Projects, for half the price, will serve ten Brazilian States (Minas, Bahia, Pernambuco, Sergipe, Alagoas, Paraíba, Rio Grande do Norte, Ceará, Piauí and Maranhão).

The government insists that the Alternative Projects are complementary actions to the great and expensive Transposition Project. And I would ask: Why not invert the statement? First let's undertake the Alternative Projects, which are economically more encompassing, ecologically sustainable, socially fair, and ethically correct, since they respect the sacred calling of water to be a crucial good for life and to serve a basic right, that is, quenching human and animal thirst.

I conclude by stating that this subject is not only technical, of the government's jurisdiction, but deeply pastoral, which concerns all of us priests since it refers to the life of millions of Brazilians entrusted to us who claim for life and “abundance of life”.

Thank you!

\*Declaration at the 46<sup>th</sup> Assembly of CNBB, from April 2 to 11, 2008, in Itaici, Indaiatuba (SP).

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Translated by Rodrigo Sardenberg. The original in Portuguese is available at [http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci\\_issuetoc&pid=0103-401420080002&lng=pt&nrm=iso](http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_issuetoc&pid=0103-401420080002&lng=pt&nrm=iso).